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SUBJECT: STATUS ON JAIL SENTENCES FOR JOURNALISTS

REF: A. ALGIERS 918

1B. ALGIERS 1003

11. There are currently two Algerian journalists in prison, nine sentenced to prison terms and awaiting appeal, and two on trial for defamation. It is perhaps worth noting that all the defamation cases stem from articles written in 2003 or earlier.

TWO JOURNALISTS IN PRISON

12. Mohamed Benchicou, former director of Le Matin, is currently serving a two-year prison sentence for illegal money transfer and has been sentenced to an additional 5 months in jail for two defamation cases. He has appealed the defamation convictions. Former Chief Executive Officer of Errai al-Aam Ahmed Benaoum is currently in prison for embezzlement of public goods. Benaoum had previously been convicted of business fraud and defamation, and was released after serving his sentence. He was later tried and convicted of the embezzlement charge. The charges were considered spurious by many journalists and local officials, and although he was suspected of corruption himself in Oran, some local officials and journalists believe that he is being punished for his efforts to expose local "mafia" corruption.

NINE JOURNALISTS SENTENCED TO JAIL AND AWAITING APPEAL

13. The following nine journalists have been convicted of defamation, and all are free awaiting appeal.

--Former Liberte Editor in Chief Farid Alilat was sentenced to one year in prison.

--In a separate trial, Liberte Publication Director Abrous Outoudert and Cartoonist Ali Dilem were sentenced to six months imprisonment for a cartoon published in 2001.

--Publication Director Fouad Boughanem and Journalist Reda Belhajouja, both from Le Soir D'Algerie, were sentenced to two months in prison.

--Four Le Matin Journalists have been convicted of defamation: Youcef Rezzoug, and Yasmine Ferroukhi were sentenced to three months imprisonment, while Abba Cherif and Hassane Zerrouky were sentenced to two months imprisonment.

TWO JOURNALISTS AWAITING TRIAL FOR DEFAMATION

14. There are two journalists from Le Soir D'Algerie on trial for defamation, Kamel Amarni and Fouad Boughanem. The prosecution is seeking 12 months imprisonment and the trial date is June 14.

JUNE 14 EVENTS

15. Journalists from around the world are planning a gathering in Algiers and Paris on June 14 to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the imprisonment of Benchicou, at which time they plan to inaugurate the "Benchicou Journalism Award". French Journalist Robert Menard from Reporters Without Borders has requested a visa to attend the event. Also on June 14, Swiss TV will reportedly broadcast an investigative report entitled "Imprisonment of Algerian Journalists and Attempts to Quiet the Algerian Press."

ERDMAN